

Three Hundered and Fourty Three

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Summary: I will tell you what I already have, Reclaimer. There is no other choice. The Ring must be activated. 343 Guilty Spark.

Three Hundered and Fourty Three

I was re-reading the trio of Halo books this week (and will replay the first game forthwith, and shortly after that mourn my lack of gaming systems to play it's sequels), and felt the urge to write. Which is a good thing.

More specifically, I wanted to right about 343 Guilty Spark, whose presence kind of annoyed me, but whose character and background I found extremely interesting. To use an inexact quote from the book;

Many AI's, after a few years, developed what could politely be described as 'quirks', the Master Chief thought. The little robot might very well be insane.

Unquote (not exact as I don't want to take the time to get my book from upstairs). Used in reference to 343.

Some of the things 343 said intrigued me nonetheless, and this is the product.

I claim no scientific or official accuracy.

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The passageways were long and well lit, and as of yet, unaffected of the monstrosities that plagued the outer walls. They were everywhere now, and even the most foolish onlooker could see that they were doomed.

But not for him. He was an automated creation, impervious to the disease that had been wrought upon his masters and creators. Free of

most of the fallibilities that plagued the remainder of his masters.

It was less of a disease though, he thought, and more like a parasite. Clinging to its host with surprising determination for something so seemingly unintelligent. A very determined parasite.

He paused a moment, turned right into another metallic room, and began to hum a happy, bouncy tune. None of his haggard looking masters even looked at him strangely anymore as he did this. They were simply too exhausted and desperate to voice any complaint.

He passed through the room, and entered another. He floated up to the lone figure, and the blue glow he gave off lit up his master's face in a ghostly way in the semi-lit room. The machine wasn't the only light in the room. The terminals sitting placidly in front of his master also gave off a ghostly glow. His master sat still for several minutes, staring at the semi-translucent screen, as if the meaning of life were hidden there and if he stared long enough the answer would reveal itself.

This was all the proverbial hogwash though. His master's slow breathing and glazed eyes indicated that he wasn't looking at the screen at all. 343 Guilty Spark floated for several minutes before the silence was broken, and the living occupant of the room spoke.

"Is everything prepared?" Was the question.

"The Rings are stable and all the specifications you requested have been initialized." 343 Guilty Spark bobbed in answer. "The flood are guaranteed to be within its considerable range and the Index is in place. It only needs you now to activate it Reclaimer."

Reclaimer gave a slow, pensive nod.

343 Guilty Spark processed these actions and came to the conclusion that his master may be hesitating. He ran through several possible reasons for this, and deemed it appropriate to ask.

"Reclai-" He started to question.

"Would you do it?" The Reclaimer cut him off midsentence. 343 was momentarily confused, processed what he deemed to be an appropriate pause, and answered.

"Would I do what Reclaimer?" 343 bobbed in the air again.

"Would you, if you were a living, organic being, activate the rings? Condemn countless people to their doom?" 343 processed the question, and the answer was almost instantaneously clear. Why was his master having doubts over such a simple question?

"I believe the answer should be clear. The Flood has spread, and there is no other choice. The Ring must be activated. Are you having doubts Reclaimer?"

His master paused. His brows furrowed and his expression was pensive.

"I just want to be sure that there really is no other option. Is it really worth sacrificing countless lives when they're going to survive with or without food? And what happens when life replants itself in the galaxy? How could they possibly fare any better than we have?"

"I cannot know Reclaimer. I am a construct, not a fortune teller." 343 tipped to the side, indicating a curious sort of confusion. He watched his master's face soften a little as he considered his words.

"I suppose you are right. We will simply have to wait for the future to unravel itself." His master said at length. 343 moved in such a way that it came across as the equivalent of a curious blink.

"Pardon me, Reclaimer, but as you know, when you activate the Ring-"

"It's a figure of speech Sparky." 343 was cut off yet again. He processed a mild feeling of irritation at this. "I know I won't be around after."

"Correct. You and all other sentient life forms will be-"

"I am well aware 343." His master's frown had reappeared, and the use of 343's make number showed his master's distress. Nevertheless, 343 thought it prudent to reprimand his master.

"Pardon me Reclaimer, but I find it incredibly difficult to finish what I am saying when you are constantly interrupting me." 343 said with mild irritation. His master gave a tired, worn-out kind of smile.

He did not understand what his masters were all so worried about. Death was surely not the end. It was as one of his other master's had explained to him. When a robot finally reached the end of its operational cycle, or simply outlived its usefulness, it was scrapped and remade into useful things. Surely sentient beings had a similar sort of cycle.

It was something he simply hadn't been educated upon.

He had been created specifically to monitor the Flood, and do maintenance upon the Ring he had been assigned. With the help of the Sentinels of course, he was to make sure the Flood did not leave the Ring after it had been activated. It was hardwired into his system, and he would make sure that he would not fail in any part of that.

His intelligence on his creators and other bio-species had been added as an afterthought.

His master stood from his seat and began to walk from the room.

"Let's go, Sparky. It's time for one last run."

"Affirmed, Reclaimer. Let us depart."

End
file.